Adam Parrish was a liar.

He hadn't always been one. Before Harvard, he'd simply been secretive. The truth was intact, just hidden. Omitted. Edited. He would admit to living in a trailer park if you already knew, he just wouldn't mention it if you didn't. He didn't fudge his parents' telephone number on school forms; he simply listed the number of the auto shop where he worked instead. He didn't claim his bruises were from running into furniture or slipping on stairs; he just made himself scarce until they lightened a little.

Lying was too expensive in little Henrietta, Virginia. It was too easy to be caught at it, and he didn't have the social capital to pay down any debt incurred.

But no one knew him at Harvard.

He could be anyone.

And he was.

"Shuffle until the count of twenty, while thinking of a question you want answered, then hand the cards back to me," he said.

He did his midnight tarot readings in the Weld solarium, even though he lived in Thayer. Thayer's common room lacked the appropriate atmosphere. It was in a basement and it was vast and noisy. The solarium was a tiny tower, a fortress, a wizard's lofty lair thrust high over the Harvard campus, each of the many-paned windows looking out over the quaint dark roofs of Cambridge. Inside it was tatty. Cozy. The haphazard arrangement of tables, chairs, and halogen lamps suggested that many students over many years had composed it. It smelled comfortingly of mold, of old wood.

It looked like a place magic would happen, which was another lie, because Adam Parrish wasn't doing magic.

"Do I tell you my question?" the girl sitting across the table from him asked. "Any other details or anything?"

"Nope." Adam didn't need anything else. He'd been studying her since she came up the stairs: everything about her was data for the trick. Her appraising smile. Her jagged thumbnails. Her bracelets: real silver, but badly dated, family hand-me-downs. Her cross necklace, strung up and crucified between deeply visible cleavage, her unclosed but unoccupied earring holes. The way she glanced up at his roommate Fletcher, once, twice, mouth pursed, eyelashes fluttering against her cheek a little. The careful, practiced way she used her hands as she shuffled.

Adam knew a lot about magic, proper magic, but he didn't need it for this. He knew a lot about people, and that was good enough.

"You should know that Gillian is going on about break," Fletcher said. As ever, he had a certain gravitas to him, both because of the straining sweater vest and a deep, plummy voice that suggested he was in need of a country to lead through a land war. He gazed out over the kingdom of Harvard, patting his stomach thoughtfully. "She won't rest until you say you're going with us."

"Is that what's been making my phone buzz?" Adam asked.

"No, that's probably Eliot," Fletcher said. "They won't rest until you commit to a time to go to that waffle truck."

Fletcher, Gillian, Eliot, Benjy: the Crying Club. Adam's friends at Harvard. They were very different from his high school friends in every way. They adored him.

Nearly everything he'd ever told them about himself was a lie.

Liar, liar, Adam Parrish was a liar.

tamquam

"The eleven-dollar waffle truck?" Adam said. He was proud of how he said *eleven*. He had a deep Virginia accent bred into him, but he'd finally killed it finally this semester. In the end, it had been easier than he expected: he just had to pretend he was someone else while talking. "That puts pickled things on everything?"

Fletcher said, "Can you really put a price on innovation?"

"Yes," replied Adam. "It's the basis of capitalism. We don't have to pick a time to go. It's literally called Midnight Waffle."

"Is it? You're already more informed than I. You know, Gillian pointed out that you could do your homework just as well at her house as here," Fletcher said. "Since you won't be going to…"

He stopped himself just short of the precipice, of saying *Virginia*. He shot Adam a careful look he didn't think Adam saw (Adam did). All of the Crying Club had been giving him the cautious look for the past few days, trying to gauge the best way to support their friend through this difficult time.

Fake difficult time.

Well, no, it was actually a difficult time, but not for the reason they thought.

alter idem

Liar, liar.

"Gillian just texted me, in fact," Fletcher said. "She wanted to point out that her parents' house has excellent wi-fi. I can attest to this."

"Noted," Adam remarked. He really had done a good job assembling the Crying Club, he thought. They got along so well; Fletcher had already been out to Gillian's parents' house several times this semester; Eliot and Benjy spent nearly all their time studying or going to concerts together. To the girl, he said, "Sorry about my roommate's inability to shut up. Let's take a look."

As he pretended to study the cards, she squinted at them too. They were peculiar cards, hand-me-downs from a now-dead woman. She had taught Adam everything he knew about magic and the ley line, and then she'd sent her mind out far away from her body and never come back. The art on her cards was sketchy and impressionistic, entirely in black and white. Their previous owner had spent quite a long time teaching him how to use the cards properly, to plumb the ether, to see the uncanny, but he was just using them as props.

Another lie.

"Here's what I see," Adam told her, tapping the cards as if they had anything to do with what he was saying. "You think this is about your family, but it's not. You haven't even talked to them. You just keep playing those conversations over and over in your head, but since they haven't even happened, they're hypotheticals. The problem isn't your roommate, either. If you weren't already awake all night, you wouldn't even know she was there whispering to her girlfriend on the phone. You'd just sleep through it. Anyway, you're just jealous of her because she knows what she wants and is loud about it. Jealousy's right next door to hate, isn't it? You're knocking on the wrong door. You should be asking her for pointers."

She sucked in her breath audibly; his words were hitting home, as they always did.

Imagine if he was actually using magic.

He wasn't using magic.

He was focusing on what was real: *Real* was Harvard. Real was his tidy, private dorm room (so unlike his previous home), his logical, attainable schedule (intentionally stacked tightly on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays to give himself four days off a week), his part-time mechanic job in Waltham (an aggravating but cheap commute), the luxurious meal plan (mandatory to residents), the opportunity to study the human race (for pleasure, now, instead of survival), and his passionate professors (people who seemed to regard the student body as peers, not prisoners).

Real was safe. Unreal was unsafe.

No magic.

He pressed on. “Ok, here’s the big thing: It’s okay to say you want to be in love again, and it’s ok for it— hold on, sorry.” His phone was ringing. He glanced at it; the screen said UNKNOWN CALLER. He silenced it. “Sorry. It’s okay for it to not be serious.”

The girl was doing what they were always doing around now — scanning the cards, trying to figure out which card in particular had betrayed them. They all wanted to believe it was magic, that it was something inside Adam. It was inside them, though. The only thing that ever betrayed them was themselves. Their bodies shouted the truth.

Not Adam’s, though.